

PUBLIC COMMENT ON MULE DEER SEASON CHANGES IN HD'S 502, 510, 520 & 575 FOR 2019

The public comment period ran from December 10, 2018 to January 18, 2019 and we received 14 comments.

1 Doug Stickney Miles City MT I do not support any of the proposed changes to mule deer in the 500 districts. You are trying to manage for a disease you know nothing about. Similar measures have been taken in other states and have not been effective. I feel like you are using cwd to justify our crappy management. Do not use cwd to eliminate limited entry mule deer tags. Private land owners are not going to allow increased harvest so all the changes will do is punish the public lands. We are going to find it throughout the whole state as we are surrounded by it. I'm sure as usual my comment will fall on deaf ears as your minds have already been made up.

2 Mike Birer Bridger Montana This change to the mule deer hunting regulations, at least in terms of HD 502, is long overdue. FWP and the State should have returned mule deer harvest back to the general deer A tag at least 4 years ago when it was first state it would be reinstated after the moratorium was first implemented when herds were diminished. I feel that by taking away the "trophy" statues of mule deer bucks, and making does and bucks harvestable under the general deer A tag, FWP and the State will be better able to control the mule deer herds in the area more effectively.

3 Jeff Schritz Townsend Montana My comment addresses the objectives of the proposed regulation change as well as simplifying the statewide deer regulations. Having lived in a CWD affected area (Michigan's upper peninsula 2000-2004) I know the devastation CWD can have on large areas in a short period of time. I would suggest a STATEWIDE 4pt one side or 20" minimum spread restriction on mule deer bucks along with the either sex option for ALL hunting districts. This will drive down the buck to doe ratio and hopefully reduce the "swarm" herds of does and young bucks that tend to yard up on one property thus being more susceptible to the spread of CWD. By restricting the buck harvest in this manner bucks will reach maturity giving way to more aggressive breeding behavior and better quality opportunities for hunters. As bucks roam looking for does the large herds will be dispersed and less likely to linger in one field for weeks at a time. Ultimately the state and its biologists are beholden to the hunters' interests as we are the ones who put up the money through tags, gear, and travel. Without quality hunting opportunities, interest will fade and revenue will fall. As strained as our state budget already is, it is not practical to exclude our interests thereby risking the loss of that revenue. Most hunters enter the field with the goal of a trophy buck. Those who seek meat only would be happy to harvest a doe. By restricting the bucks to "mature harvest only" hunters will see more bucks, bucks will break up the large lingering herds, and when hunters pull the trigger it will be on a critter they want rather than what they "settle" for. I for one would be ecstatic to see more bucks and less deer rather than see no deer if CWD begins to sweep across the state. Please give this idea some honest consideration, I have submitted it in good faith as a public hunter with increasingly limited opportunities for quality mule deer hunting.

4 Robert Kerr Roberts MT I support proposed changes. R. Kerr

5 Tom Eastwood Belgrade MT I am generally in favor of increasing the mule deer harvest to combat the spread of CWD. In relation to mule deer, I would suggest FWP investigate measures to boost the quality of mule deer in Montana. Whether that be minimum antler point requirements, limiting hunting during the rut period to permit only, or other measures. Sadly, Montana does not compare well to states such as Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Nevada, and Arizona when it comes to the quality of mule deer and that should not be the case where there is available quality habitat.

6 Adam Jimmerson Billings MT I guess I don't understand how you are going to manage CWD. With our state being surrounded by CWD it seems that we will just be killing off the herds with hunting and still having CWD waiting to come back into the state unless we wipe out the whole area. As far as hunting opportunities goes it will give me better chances since I use a recurve bow. I think you should base this on a year to year decision so that we don't wipe out the herds and still have no effect on CWD

7 Eric J Bashore Billings MT The solution to CWD isn't to annihilate the deer population in south-central Montana – that is another MT FWP mindless knee-jerk reaction. As such, I am against the proposed liberalizing of the harvest of mule deer bucks in the proposed Hunting Districts (especially, in Hunting District 510). Naturally, you are finding more CWD positive deer in Montana because you have actually started to test for them. CWD has been present in Montana for a long time in a low percentage of the deer population, the only difference now is that you are starting to test for it in select portions of Montana. If you tested in a scientific manner across the state you would find a small percentage of deer that test positive for CWD all across Montana. Again, the solution is not to exterminate the deer population, but rather to let the current high level of natural predation in the form of coyotes, wolves and mountain lions naturally reduce the portion of the deer herd that is weakened by CWD, while the remaining healthy deer population builds up natural immunities to CWD over time.

8 Jerad Rockvale MT With the CWD issue being the cause for this possible change in harvest from increased antlerless to either sex general seasons. This is okay but does FWP plan to have a check station in Carbon County for the what should be 100 percent mandatory reporting of harvested game. The nearest check station is in Laurel on some weekends, this check station is not open everyday or even every weekend. Only being opened on weekends skews numbers and people will not want to drive to Laurel to report a harvested animal and turn it in for sample. Do it yourself sample kits would be a great solution if you can get hunters the kits. Controlled monitoring of zones within the hunting district need to be established especially where lands are primarily private. Setting up agreements with landowners to allow a limited number of hunters to harvest a limited number of animals for monitoring purposes. The landowner would need the ability to have input on hunters that are allowed. FWP should not control who the hunter is, if they do so this will keep landowners from helping participate. District 510 definitely needs some changes to the regulations but opening it up to either sex general license will be detrimental to the Mule Deer population. Many people think this is a "trophy" area due to the special draw requirement. So opening it up to a general tag will draw many more people into the area. It was not clearly stated if the Forest Service portion will be open to antlerless on a general tag, if so this will cause a huge drop in population of MD does on the forest service lands. These does have never really been hunted and will be largely affected. Special doe/fawn tags should be made available at a limited number. Either valid on Forest service or other lands. The monitoring of CWD has been poor in this area and now that it has been found there is an increase in monitoring which in turn is showing higher numbers of animals with CWD. This tells me that the disease has been in the state for a long time and is probably in many other parts of the state that sampling is not required. A great example of this is the Greater Sage Grouse, when millions of extra dollars went into monitoring the species numbers came up, or did they? It was just the increased efforts of people on the ground finding more birds. Same concept with CWD, you increase the monitoring you will increase the number of positive animals. Many hunting districts have seen a huge decline in Mule Deer populations for years, SW MT S. central MT etc. this is possibly due to CWD being in the state for longer than know or wanting to admit. Opening these areas to either sex is a great option but most people will still want to hunt bucks. I suggest that the apprentice hunters only be allowed to harvest antlerless deer. Also increase the doe/fawn license rather than open to either sex. This way you get hunters looking for meat not antlers, this will increase the antlerless harvest.

9 Kyle Billings MT If you think this will help the spreading CWD, I'm all for it. One concern I still have is the transportation of whole carcasses or the skull with the brain matter inside. I see it hunting episodes online where they are transporting skulls all over. I'm not real sure if hunters understand the why it's such a big deal. If there would be a better way to explain it to hunters this might be a huge help on limiting the spread of CWD to new areas. Just an observation. Thanks.

